

12-10-2014

Maximizing Sharability and Persuasiveness on Web 2.0

Yuhua (Jake) Liang

Chapman University, liang@chapman.edu

Christina Lopez

Chapman University - University College, lopez221@mail.chapman.edu

Tim Seavey

Chapman University, seave100@mail.chapman.edu

Shelby Stanton

Chapman University, stant113@mail.chapman.edu

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Recommended Citation

Liang, Yuhua (Jake); Lopez, Christina; Seavey, Tim; and Stanton, Shelby, "Maximizing Sharability and Persuasiveness on Web 2.0" (2014). *Student Research Day Abstracts and Posters*. Paper 72.
http://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cusrd_abstracts/72

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CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY

WILKINSON COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Maximizing Sharability and Persuasiveness on Web 2.0

Liang, Y., Lopez, C., Seavey, T., Stanton, S.
Department of Communication Studies



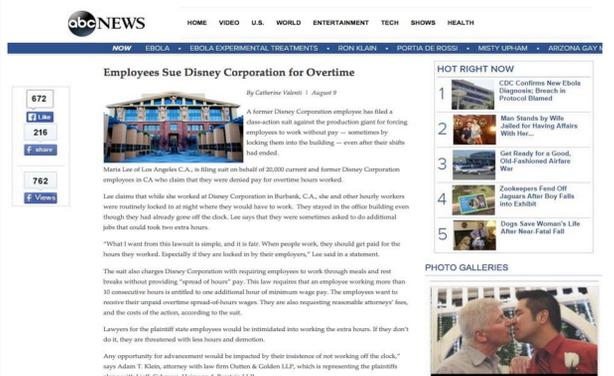
Introduction

Online marketing efforts usually focus on the persuasiveness of a message (Cheung, 2013) or the sharability of a message (Berger, 2014). Today, over 500 million people interact on Facebook on a regular basis (Kross et al., 2013). However, research has not established if and when these two concepts align, such that a message is maximally persuasive and sharable. According to Berger (2014), individuals are likely to share content based on one primary factor: when the message allows one to present oneself favorably online. If an individual believes that a website's content is likely to cause other readers to view him or her as more favorable, then this individual will be more likely to share the website's content. Adopting a Web 2.0 framework (Walther & Jang, 2012) enables aggregated online cues to be conceptualized in such a way as to suggest that the content is likely or unlikely to be received favorably by readers. In terms of persuasion, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) can be employed to examine whether or not individuals will be persuaded in terms of the message content and their personal involvement. Specifically, messages differ in argument quality (high / low) and the inclusion of emotional appeals. The current research proposal outlines a test of when sharability and persuasion aligns by examining online cues and types of message content.

Proposed Hypothesis

Sharability and persuasion will be examined in terms of their effects on receiver attitudes and sharability. The study utilizes an original experiment that varies message quality (3: high argument strength, direct or low quality argument strength, and emotional message) x Web 2.0 cues (i.e., ratio of views, likes, and shares) to signal self-presentation (2: favorable or unfavorable) design. The table below denotes our predictions. The following are concepts that relate to the table described. Each weight is given a number based on the influence the group hypothesizes it will have. We predict that emotional content will receive the most shares because individuals will associate this type of content with the highest form of self-presentation denoted as +2 in Table 1. For example, Disneyland annual pass holders who view an article about Disney Corporation may find it relatable and powerful and will be more likely to share the content. High Argument Quality will likely drive individuals to share, however, not as frequently as emotional appeals. For example, if someone views an article about a new virus going around that has very factual evidence but does not contain a personal narrative or something relatable to the reader, they will feel less connected although still persuaded by the message.

Figure 1. High Quality Argument Website



Proposed Hypothesis Continued

We also predict that low self-presentation in combination with Emotional Appeal (+1) will be close in number of shares to High Argument Quality (+1) combined with high self-presentation. Even if individuals are not looking to gain some social currency (Berger, 2013), they are still likely to respond to a personal narrative or emotionally provoking story. Based on Berger, we predict +0 weight with High Argument Quality and low self-presentation. For example, a website that features pictures of cute kittens and urges viewers to adopt pets at a local shelter may persuade users to adopt kittens though they may not share the website on social media. Finally we predict that high self-presentation and Low Argument Quality (+1) will result in the likelihood of very few shares.

Table 1. Hypothesized Contrast Weights

Predicted	Contrast	Coefficients				
		Attitude Change	Likelihood of	Sharing		
	Emotional	High Argument Quality	Low Argument Quality	Emotional	High Argument Quality	Low Argument Quality
High Self-Presentation	+2	+1	-3	+1	+1	+1
Low Self-Presentation	+1	+0	-1	-1	-1	-1

Proposed Method (IRB APPROVED)

Participants

Participants include Chapman University students who sign up using the Communication Department's subject pool. Or, students will participate from other courses where instructors offered extra credit for their participation in completing the study. Assuming a moderate effect and following a statistical power analysis, we propose to include 30 participants per condition, resulting in a total of 180 participants. For the dependent ratios we will be using 216 shares to 762 for the three websites with a high number of shares. For the dependent ratios on the websites with a low number of shares we will use 2 shares to 762 views.



Figure 1. high self-presentation images used in our message

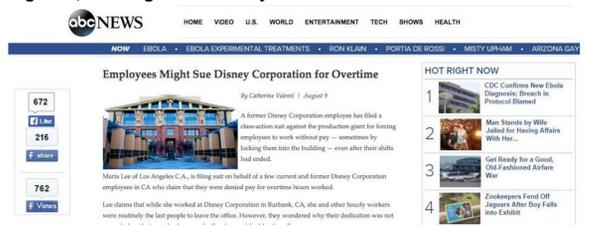


Figure 2. low self-presentation images used in our message

Experimental Stimuli

We have created two main web pages. Each page contains the three variations of our message. Participants are randomly assigned to the message condition. We will utilize High Quality arguments, Low-Quality arguments and Emotional Appeals. We produced High Quality arguments in our messages by including numerical data as well as names, which are more concrete.

Figure 3. Low Argument Quality Website



The rationale for this hypothesis is that if individuals believe an argument does not have factual evidence and has little emotional component to it, they will feel less connection. If the reader does not connect, the reader is likely to believe those they are sharing it with will also feel a lack of reliability and be uninterested in the content. Our final prediction is that Low Argument Quality and low self-presentation will also result in very few if any shares and/or likes. In the table below we express these concepts explored above using contrast weights so that everything in a row adds up to zero. These numbers have been included previously in parenthesis to allow for a better understanding of the weight each number measurement. The more shares and/or likes we expect a concept to have, the larger the number. The fewer shares and/or likes we expect a concept to have, the lower the number.

In our Low-Quality arguments we used generic descriptions in the content as well as direct messaging with vague information. For the Emotional Appeal messages we used a narrative based message with testimonials such as Lee's statement in the Disney Corporation message. We produced each of these messages by creating webpages. One set of webpages contains three unique types of content relating to a recent scandal at Disney Corporation. The first website is full of factual information, the second has a very emotional narrative and the third has low arguments for why the scandal occurred. We produced another set of webpages relating to the Ebola crisis. The first set of webpages also contains three different styles of content. The first website includes facts about Ebola and what it has done to a country, the second is very emotional and deals with an individual's story in the fight against Ebola and the third includes very irrelevant facts that do not pertain to the reader's interest or involvement. To examine which of these impacts a person's likelihood to share the article based on whether or not this content will result in High-Self Presentation or Low Self-Presentation: it will be represented in a 3 X 2 design, with message content as the repeated factor. High self-presentation is represented in the following ratio: 762 views, 216 shares and 672 likes. The higher number of likes and shares seen by the reader will create high self-presentation if they choose to share the content. Low self-presentation is represented in the following ratio: 762 views, 2 shares, and 16 likes. To measure persuasion, we will assess participants' attitude toward the target corporation (Disney) using a 4-item 7-point semantic differentiate measure including items such as good/bad, credible/not credible. Next we will ask whether or not the participants shared the content. By juxtaposing these two items, we will examine how sharability is related to persuasion.

Procedures

In an anonymous online experiment, participants will first read and sign the consent form to formally participate online. Participants will be provided a link via email to a survey that will also provide a link to one of our various message conditions. The experiment will be done via laptop at the leisure of each individual throughout the duration of a specific time period during which the experiment is designated to be completed. The participant will view the stimuli, and they have the freedom to share the content directly from the page. After viewing the message the participant will fill out a follow-up survey after completing their responses. Our dependent variables are the attitudes measured against Sharability. When users visit a website their likelihood of sharing the page can be predicted by their attitude toward the subject and the content quality of the message on the page.



Theoretical and Practical Contributions

We expect our research findings to show that content expressing high self presentation and a strong emotional persuasive appeal is most likely to be shared by the content consumer. The results can be used to inform future studies relating to the fields of communication and technology. More importantly, it would stimulate theoretical work that addresses the motivations behind sharing and attitude change resulting from persuasion.

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